



*Acting within
Declaration on Human Rights Defenders*



CAMPAIGN

TO PROMOTE

UN DECLARATION ON HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN SERBIA



YUCOM



Auswärtiges Amt

**Supported by
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1 | METHODOLOGY

In the period between July 1 and December 31 2008, Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights carried out the project **CAMPAIGN TO PROMOTE UN DECLARATION ON HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN SERBIA**, with the aim to:

- adopt the Declaration as binding national legislation,
- raise the level of political culture through expert and public debates, propaganda in the media and training courses organized in cooperation with local and international experts, and
- enable creating an atmosphere of understanding the necessity of work of human rights activists and groups, particularly those dealing with problems of confronting the past.

The campaign's methodology designed by the YUCOM expert team in early July was based on:

- use of international mechanisms for the protection and promotion of human rights (both universal, by means of the Universal Periodic Review before the Human Rights Council, and regional, before the Council of Europe;
- training of nongovernmental organizations for the possibilities of using the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders;
- raising the politicians' awareness about the importance of the UN Declaration on Human Rights;
- citing provisions of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders while providing legal aid to attacked human rights defenders;
- raising awareness of state organs about the necessity of protecting human rights defenders as an element contained in the Declaration.



2 THROUGH THE UN TO PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

The state of human rights in Serbia was the subject of evaluation before the UN Human Rights Council in December 2008. The evaluation of the state of human rights is the basis for concrete recommendations to Serbia, which, after Serbia accepts them, will become a useful instrument in the process of exerting legitimate pressure on the state to improve the state of human rights when it comes to certain issues.

In regard to that, nongovernmental organizations had the opportunity to submit a report in July 2008 in which they presented their estimate of the state of human rights, thus influencing the formulation of the recommendations to Serbia. On July 22nd 2008, Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights and Women in Black submitted the *YUCOM and Women in Black JOINT INPUT for UPR - SERBIA 2008*¹ in which they presented the position of human right defenders in Serbia. These problems were chosen for the presentation in accordance with the conclusion by YUCOM that the best way to influence the change of awareness of the government and the public about the importance of human rights defenders is primarily by legitimate "pressure" by the international community.

As assumed, the report on the state of human rights prepared by the State of Serbia did not address the issue of human rights defenders. However, with the help of the *YUCOM and Women in Black JOINT INPUT for UPR - SERBIA 2008* report as well as the report by UN agencies which was partially based on information provided by YUCOM, one of the main recommendations in the DRAFT REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON THE UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW² is the following:

In the course of the discussion, the following recommendations were made to Serbia: To promote the work of the human rights defenders (Sweden, Canada, Switzerland) and take all necessary measures to ensure their safety (France, Czech Republic) and freedom of expression (Switzerland) and ensure they have a favorable working environment (France); to follow up to the recommendation of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General regarding the situation of human rights defenders and denounce more forcefully verbal and physical attacks against human rights defenders (Germany, Norway); to adopt a national plan of action to enhance the protection of human rights defenders and independent journalists (Netherlands), to develop and implement a comprehensive strategy designed to protect human rights defenders, including those working on behalf of the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender persons (Canada); to apply the Yogyakarta Principles as a guide for the new policies in the area of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender rights (Netherlands); and ensure the effective investigation of alleged attacks against human rights defenders (Canada, Ireland);

After the publishing of the December 10th 2008 Draft Report, the Ministry of Human and Minority rights in cooperation with the UN Office for Human Rights and the OSCE Mission in Serbia,

¹http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session3/RS/YUCOM_WIB_SRB_UPR_S3_2008_LawyersCommitteeforHumanRights_WomeninBlack_uprsubmission.pdf

² http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session3/RS/A_HRC_WG6_3_L10_Serbia_E.pdf

organized for the first time a discussion entitled “Human Rights Defenders” on December 18th 2008.

Lawyers’ Committee for Human Rights used this meeting to promote the necessity of adopting the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. The meeting had very good media coverage (ANEX I)³, particularly the statements of Chairwoman Biljana Kovačević-Vučo. The following is only one example:

As early as 1999, the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, urging member states to adopt the Declaration.

Serbia, of course, is yet to adopt it, and the threats against activists and lack of any protection by the state were the reason of the Human Rights Defenders meeting, which was held at the newly named Palata Srbije (Serbian Palace) on Thursday. The meeting organized by the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, the UN Office for Human Rights and OSCE Mission, was attended by representatives of several nongovernmental organizations.

The busiest person, as always, and with a reason, was Biljana Kovačević-Vučo, who underlined that we do not have a felony of jeopardizing security in the Penal Code of Serbia, and that if this occurs, it was only possible to file private charges.

She pointed out that Serbia should as soon as possible “revitalize” the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and that it should „become a part of every democratic country”. „This document proscribes what the state is supposed to do for efficient work of human rights defenders”.

According to Kovačević-Vučo, Serbian politicians avoid communication with human rights defenders, because it is “mostly bad for their ratings”. She emphasized that security “in its harmonious” sense cannot be avoided when speaking about human rights defenders, reminding about the attacks against the Chairwoman of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia Sonja Biserko. (E-novine, December 18 2008)

YUCOM will continue to “remind” the State about the measures which, as promised by the Minister of Human and Minority Rights Svetozar Čiplić at the Universal Periodic Review of Serbia session, the State will take with the aim of improving the position of human rights defenders.

³ Danas, **Demand that the state secures human rights defenders**, December 18th, 2008, http://www.danas.rs/vesti/drustvo/zahtev_da_drzava_obebedi_branitelje_ljudskih_prava.55.html?news_id=148652; Kurir, **State to secure human rights defenders**, December 18th, 2008, <http://www.kurir-info.rs/aktuelne-vesti/2008-12-18/drzava-da-obebedi-branitelje-ljudskih-prava>; E-novine, **Assembly of human rights defenders**, December 18th 2008, <http://www.e-novine.com/sr/drustvo/clanak.php?id=20288>; B92, **Unfavorable status of human rights defenders**, December 18th, 2008, http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2008&mm=12&dd=18&nav_id=335184.



3 | LOBBYING BY USING REGIONAL MECHANISMS FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The Council of Europe delegation, consisting of Berry Kralj – advisor and desk officer for Southeastern Europe, and Andrew Ford – advisor with the Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner’s office, **held a meeting with representatives of the Lawyers’ Committee for Human Rights on September 8th** at the YUCOM offices. The delegation’s mission is the preparation for the visit of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Thomas Hammarberg. The preparations are being carried out through the delegation’s meetings with key partners about the situation in the field of human rights and political issues before presenting their conclusions to the Commissioner prior to his arrival in Serbia.

Before the meeting, the Council of Europe delegation was presented YUCOM’s Early Warning System, a weekly newsletter published since March 2008 which underlines all challenges for democracy and the institutional development of Serbia. YUCOM is pleased to report that members of the delegation were already familiar with the newsletter’s contents, as they evaluated it as an important tool for their report.

Subject particularly dealt with during the meeting was **United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and the issue of human rights defenders’ safety:**

"It was pointed out at the practice by the authorities and orchestrated media to create a negative image about human rights defenders, as well as at numerous interferences with the nongovernmental organizations’ activities, opposing the UN Declaration on Human Right Defenders. Obstacles (ranging from denying financial resources, unfavorable tax treatment, to legal charges by government representatives for alleged insults, slander etc.) must be emphasized as examples of illegal and unfair actions by the state toward human rights defenders which was the reason that YUCOM launched a campaign for promoting the said Declaration."

This was followed by the evaluation by Hammarberg on the state of human rights in Serbia and direct recommendations to the authorities during a meeting on October 17th 2008. Although a detailed report will be published in the beginning of 2009, main conclusions and guidelines were published a day after the Council of Europe’s visit to Serbia.

"Despite some steps in the right direction, obstacles to the effective implementation of human rights standards remain in Serbia", says the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Thomas Hammarberg, completing a high-level official visit to the Republic of Serbia. (...)

*"Human Rights Defenders work for the benefit of society and should not be seen as a threat", warns the Commissioner. "I have been shocked by some unfortunate media reporting. State condemnation of threats to human rights defenders is imperative."*⁴

4

[https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=PR738\(2008\)&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=DC&BackColorInternet=F5CA75&BackColorIntranet=F5CA75&BackColorLogged=A9BACE](https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=PR738(2008)&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=DC&BackColorInternet=F5CA75&BackColorIntranet=F5CA75&BackColorLogged=A9BACE)

4 | NGO TRAINING



Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights decided to bring closer the UN Declaration on Human Rights to actual human rights defenders, in order for them to use it as instrument of protection in their daily work. In an atmosphere of negative public opinion about human rights defenders, it is necessary that the defenders are well acquainted with the provisions of the Declaration which can represent an efficient means of defense and legitimization and legalization of activities which are often demonized. After it was translated to Serbian, the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders was

interpreted by an expert team with the use of a systemic approach. The interpreting of the Declaration had the aim to bring its provisions in relation with widely recognized standards in the field of human rights, stemming from basic UN and Council of Europe treaties. By doing so, it was the intention of the expert team to present the fact that the provisions of the Declaration were closely connected and that they originate from documents which have a wide use, thus increasing the credibility of the provisions.

The second level of interpreting the Declaration had the aim to create an instrument for human rights defenders. That way, YUCOM presented the Serbian public with a detailed list of well-known activities by human rights defenders, which had a stronghold in specific provisions of the Declaration.

Based on this interpretation, a Power Point presentation was created which illustrated the state's obligations towards human rights defenders, as well as their guaranteed rights. The Power Point presentation was shown at workshops and panel discussions in which human rights defenders, as well as politicians, took part.

The conference **Women, Peace, Security**



*The conference **Women, Peace, Security** was organized by Women in Black and Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights with the aim to raise awareness about the issue of security of women and women human rights defenders, as well as to discuss instruments for their protection - Resolution 1325 and the so-called UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.*

The conference was held at the Centre for Cultural Decontamination on October 30th 2008, one day before the Resolution 1325 Day, which was marked by women human rights defenders by visiting the People's Assembly of the Republic of Serbia.

The conference: Women, Peace, Security, held at the Centre for Cultural Decontamination was attended by female representatives of nongovernmental organizations, unions, political parties, as



well as representatives of central, regional and local authorities from all of Serbia.

In an opening word, Staša Zajović, Coordinator of Women in Black, pointed out the fact that the taxpayers' money was often used to finance death. She stated that women suffer the greatest burden of militarism, and war is the primary cause of their poverty. YUCOM Chairwoman Biljana Kovačević-Vučo noted that Serbia adopts declaratory laws which are not implemented and that the system we live in still has to make a discontinuity with the Milošević era values. She reminded the panelists of the recent attacks against Sonja Biserko, which directly jeopardized Biserko's life.

After the introduction, Ministry of Justice representative Gordana Pualić expressed her support of the initiative by Women in Black and YUCOM, stating that the implementation of Resolution 1325 and the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders will be supported by the Justice Ministry.

The session: From a traditional to a humane concept of security – global and regional level featured the following panelists: Prof. Vesna Rakić – Vodinelić (CUPS), Prof. Dragana Dulić, Faculty of Civil Defense in Belgrade and Snežana Tabački, Women in Black.

Women are the greatest victims of jeopardized security, Vesna Rakić-Vodinelić said. They make up the largest number of civilian victims and refugee population and are exposed to rape. Women have much more difficulties than men getting resources which could save them, such as food, services, and financial means. Dragana Dulić from the Faculty of Civil Defense emphasized that Serbia does not have an orientation toward the notion of human security, which is a salutary idea and a concept that needs to be defended by women unreservedly.

Panelists of the session: State of security in Serbia: obstacles, reforms, challenges... included: Verica Barać (Anti-Corruption Council), Rodoljub Šabić (Commissioner for Information of Public Importance) and Jelena Milić (Director of the Centre for Euro-Atlantic Studies).

Jelena Milić expressed her standpoint that "the issue of security is hostage of the policy on Kosovo". She stated that Serbia is perceived as source of insecurity in the region, and the cases of the soldiers' murders in Topčider and Leskovac was still in an obscure phase of the investigation. Verica Barać pointed out that institutions in Serbia are not functioning, in spite of good laws, which is mostly the consequence of a lack of political will to suppress corruption in Serbia. Corruption represents a danger to the security of the entire society and it will exist until there is an inconstant use of the State Audit Law and irrational omissions in using developed resources of institutions which are capable to combat corruption. Information Commissioner Rodoljub Šabić stated that the new Personal Information Protection Law restricts his authority, proving mistrust by the political elite when it comes to independent institutions which are supposed to provide protection of human rights. He urged all human rights defenders to continue to persistently advocate the idea of complete respect of the principle of public government transparency in accordance with reached standards in the international community, which directly contributes to the improving of individual security.

A presentation of the Resolution 1325 and Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and the previous activities of Women in Black and YUCOM in the raising of awareness on the necessity of the said documents' implementation, was followed by the session: Security of activists and human rights defenders in Serbia with panelists: Biljana Kovačević-Vučo (YUCOM), Boban Stojanović (Queeria), Zoe Gudović (Women at Work and Queer Belgrade) and Maja Stojanović (Youth Initiative for Human Rights, Niš).

Biljana Kovačević-Vučo pointed out numerous aspects of jeopardized personal security of human rights defenders, calling on the panelists to react to such attacks by organizing and expressing their solidarity with victims of lynch by the authorities and illegal neo-Nazi organizations. Queeria activist Boban Stojanović found confirmation that we live in a deeply criminalized society a few days ago when a pet store saleswoman recommended him to buy the same brand of cat food which was purchased by Legija's daughter. He stated his opinion that, by permitting an anti-fascist protest in which Stojanović did not participate, Dačić washed his hands and "it seems as though Dačić will allow a Gay Pride rally". Zoe Gudović, activist of Queer Belgrade and Women at Work, spoke about attacks against participants of the Queer festivals in Belgrade and Sarajevo, describing the attackers as fascist aged between 18 and 22. She expressed her disgust with the fact that society always shows understanding for them, reminding that hatred unites those who aim to destroy somebody who is different. Maja Stojanović from the Youth Initiative for Human Rights in Niš stated that the majority of citizens have the idea of their security, and that they feel safe because they keep silent. She remembers September 24th for the news about the Open Day of the Army of Serbia and the children who shot from firearms, later describing it as the most interesting day of their lives. She also mentioned the case of the Philosophical Faculty of Niš where a panel discussion which denied genocide in Srebrenica was allowed.

The session: What is security for women? On the antimilitaristic-feministic concept of security included the following panelists: Nevena Kostić, Leskovac (Women for Peace/Women in Black Network), Aida Ćorović (Urban In, Novi Pazar) and Staša Zajović, Women in Black.

Aida Ćorović, Chairwoman of the Urban In NGO from Novi Pazar stated that she feels like a second rate citizen in the city and the country she lives in. The state's attitude towards citizen of Bosniak nationality, a very strong influence of Sulejman Ugljanin, division between Muslims – those are only some of the problems she addressed. She expressed her belief that a greater level of solidarity with woman from provincial areas is necessary...

All participants of the discussion agreed that solidarity is one of the key instruments for the protection of women human rights defenders, as well as an instrument for exerting pressure on the state to adopt documents and develop institutions which will guarantee security for women and the society as a whole.

❖ The workshop **Women and Security**



*The workshop **Women and Security** was organized by Women in Black and Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights with the aim to raise awareness about the issue of security of women and women human rights defenders, as well as to discuss instruments for their protection - Resolution 1325 and UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.*

The workshop was held in Leskovac on the December 16th 2008. It was attended by female representatives of nongovernmental organizations from Leskovac, Vranje, Vlasotice and Niš.



The workshop also included a Power Point presentation about Human Rights Defenders. YUCOM representative Katarina Jozić explained to human rights defenders that the Declaration proclaims their rights and obligations and that it was desirable that they cite the provisions of the Declaration in their activities. By doing so, during attacks against them, human rights defenders legitimize themselves in the most efficient manner before the public which often does not see any difference between human rights defenders and groups which act against the principles of fundamental UN treaties on human rights. Katarina Jozić explained that the Declaration can be used as an instrument that helps to present to the state and the society the universally recognized importance of the role of human rights defenders in society. That way, the position of human rights defenders, i.e. human rights, is strengthened in Serbia. It was also pointed out at the workshop that, guided by the Declaration, YUCOM and Women in Black notified the Human Rights Council about the position of human rights defenders, which resulted with recommendations to Serbia to improve the position of human rights defenders.

5 | RAISING THE POLITICIANS' AWARENESS ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DECLARATION



October 31st 2008

RECEPTION AT THE PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY

Women in Black and YUCOM representatives spoke with Peoples' Assembly deputies about the implementation of Resolution 1325 and the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

On the occasion of Day of the Security Council Resolution 1325 for the establishing of conflict solving mechanisms based on gender equality, parliament deputies Snežana Stojanović-Plavšić, Elvira Kovacs and Nikola Novaković (Deputy Speaker of the People's Assembly) received representatives of nongovernmental organizations Women in Black and YUCOM at the People's Assembly on October 31st 2008.

After years of unsuccessful submitting of the Resolution 1325 by Women in Black and YUCOM to the Parliament's consideration, for the first time there were talks at the meeting about the importance of participation of women in mechanisms which guarantee the security of citizens (of both sexes) of Serbia and a foundation was established for the cooperation between the nongovernmental sector and parliamentarians in the realization of the Resolution's demands.

At the same time, members of Parliament were acquainted with obligations from the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and urged to protect women human rights defenders, by adopting the Declaration as well as to take part in other ways in the promotion and protection of human rights.



A detailed report about this event as well as the aforementioned Conference Women, Peace, Security (October 30 2008) in which numerous female politicians took place, was published on the YUCOM website. A banner/link was placed on the starting page of the website, in order to make the material available to other politicians who did not take part. Among other things, it was our aim to publish the Justice Ministry representatives' statements about the support in further actions. This, in addition to the reception of human rights defenders in the Parliament, points out to other politicians that the ruling circles recognize the importance of this issue in Serbia.



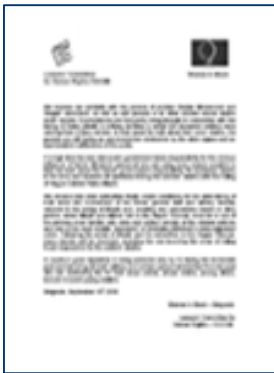
6 | DECLARATION AS INSTRUMENT OF PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

The Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights (YUCOM) implements its legal aid through:

- Representation and defense of victims who have had their human rights violated;
- Promotion of human rights;
- Advocating for the respect of and improvement of human rights ;
- Advocating for the adoption of a declaration and resolution concerning the obligation of States to respect human rights;
- Defense of Human Rights Defenders.

During the 11 years of its activism, YUCOM gained a profile as one of the most aggressive protectors and defenders of human rights, representing many jeopardized human rights defenders before courts and other state organs of Serbia. Adequate legal aid was followed with organized media campaign in order to acquaint the public (both domestic and international) with the processes, thus creating a realistic basis for the evaluation of position of human rights defenders. Such action is necessary due to a lack of adequate state protection (court and police) because the sources of the attacks are certain centers of power that are heavily criticized by human rights defenders for the illegality or illegitimacy of their actions. As YUCOM is well-known as protector of human rights, it comes as no surprise that this NGO is the current leader when it comes to the number of processes led against it. Despite of that fact, YUCOM's attorneys still manage to provide legal aid to jeopardized human rights defenders. That was the case in October 2008 when, on the occasion of attacks against Sonja Biserko, YUCOM created a strategy of defense and carried it out.

- **Protection of human rights defenders -
on the occasion of attacks against Sonja Biserko, Chairwoman of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia**



In regard to the attack against Sonja Biserko, YUCOM deemed quick and efficient action necessary in order to prevent the violence against the Chairwoman of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia from escalating and violating her physical integrity. YUCOM initiated the swift forming of an ad hoc coalition of human rights defenders from the entire territory of Serbia for the support of its press release which expresses solidarity with Sonja Biserko. The statement presents to the public the contents of the attack against Sonja Biserko, calling on state organs to take measures of protection as proscribed by the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. The press release was signed by 25 nongovernmental organizations and the action had good media

coverage (Annex I)⁵. It was sent to over one million addresses by using the system and mailing list of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia.

⁵ Peščanik, Solidarity with Sonja Biserko.

SOLIDARITY WITH SONJA BISERKO (Press release, October 1st, 2008)

The statement is in response to yesterday's act of vandalism against the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights by the violent group who is self-named Movement 1389, that the media ill-fatedly calls a protest. The Movement 1389 has unlawfully protested against the arrest of Radovan Karadzic for more than seventy days, with the permission and presence of state institutions. The non-governmental organizations listed as signatories below demand a response from President Boris Tadic and the Minister of Internal Affairs Ivica Dacic, and herewith we remind that:

- for more than a week the media has not ceased its pursuit of Sonja Biserko, the President of Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, in relation to the Report of Helsinki Committee for the year 2007;
- Sonja Biserko, without any sort of reaction and protection is exposed to incredible pressure, discrimination, and chauvinist antics; moreover, it is being done by individuals who at minimum would undergo moral condemnation in any respectable country respecting human rights standards and democratic values, and in a state with the rule of law they would be prosecuted;
- the media's pursuit, in the name of so-called protection of freedom of thought, denies Helsinki Committee and Sonja Biserko their freedom of thought and calls for the lynching of Sonja Biserko as a traitor of the 'homogenous Serbianhood';
- by intimidating Sonja Biserko, they intimidate all those who remember and who want to bring to light facts and demand responsibility for the crimes committed in our name during the 1990s'. The attacks against Sonja Biserko are an attempt to eradicate facts put forward in the Report.

Non-governmental organizations demand that state institutions finally start respecting the Constitution and laws of this country, and stop treating legal issues as ideological and political issues. We also demand that in accordance with the Constitution and laws of this country, which include ratified international documents, the state finally start to implement, without political thought or calculation, the provisions regarding the suppression of activities and operations of organizations that promote hatred, discrimination, racism, and all other forms of intolerance and hatred.

Non-governmental organizations demand that state institutions stop addressing us with releases and start applying the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders adopted by United Nations General Assembly on March 8, 1999 (Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Right and Fundamental Freedoms). The Declaration, in Article 12 Clause 2, provides that the state must undertake all necessary measures to ensure protection from any kind of violence, threat of retaliation, de facto and de jure hostile discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary deed resulting from the legitimate use of one's rights guaranteed by the Declaration.

Women in Black
Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights

- Center for Cultural Decontamination
- Center for Peace and Development of Democracy
- Belgrade Center for Human Rights
- Center for Advancement of Law Studies
- Independent Association of Journalists of Vojvodina

This release is supported by:
- Youth Initiative for Human Rights



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- Queeria Center
- Center for Regionalism, Novi Sad
- Vojvodjanka, Novi Sad
- Alternative Cultural Center, Nis
- Women's Reconstruction Fund
- Glas Razlike
- Incest Trauma Center
- Zmig, Pancevo
- Esperanca, Novi Sad
- Women for Peace, Leskovac
- SOS phone-line for women and children victims of violence, Vlasotince
- Zar, Kikinda
- Women in Action, Velika Plana
- Pescanik, Krusevac
- Women's Club Hera, Backa Topola
- NLO, Novi Sad Lesbian Organization
- Alternative Novi Sad organization

After expressing solidarity which acquainted the public with the case of jeopardizing a human right defender, YUCOM has **contacted the Ministry of Interior and the National Security Agency (BIA)**, asking for a series of measures to be taken in order to hamper possible grave consequences of these attacks. In addition, an official assessment of the security status of Ms Sonja Biserko was requested from the Ministry of Interior. Once again, provisions of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders were pointed out, in the demand for protection of human rights defenders,

YUCOM notified the public about these activities in a press release which had good media coverage (See Annex I)⁶



PRESS RELEASE OF YUCOM (October, 7th, 2008)

On the subject of the series of public attacks on Ms Sonja Biserko, president of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Lawyers Committee for Human Rights – YUCOM has contacted the Ministry of Interior and the National Security Agency (BIA), asking for the series of measures to be taken in order to hamper possible grave consequences of these attacks. In addition, an official assessment of the security status of Ms Sonja Biserko was requested from the Ministry of Interior.

The attacks, which had started in media, have spread to include physical attack on the premises of Helsinki Committee in Serbia, and the place of residence of Ms Biserko, just as to culminate in the open letter written to Ms Biserko by Milorad Ulemek⁷, published in daily Kurir on October 6, 2008, where he joins the crowd of previous attackers on Ms Biserko, and throws a wave of personal insults to Ms Biserko.

Non-governmental organizations demand that state institutions start applying the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders adopted by United Nations General Assembly on March 8, 1999 (Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Right and Fundamental Freedoms). The Declaration, in Article 12 Clause 2, provides that the state must undertake all necessary measures

⁶ BETA, **Demand for protection of Sonja Biserko to the Interior Ministry and BIA**, October 7th 2008; Tanjug, **YUCOM seeks protection of Sonja Biserko**, October 7th 2008; 24 sata, **YUCOM seeks protection of Sonja Biserko**, October 7th 2008, <http://www.24sata.co.yu/vesti.php?id=35505>; Večernje Novosti, **YUCOM seeks protection of Sonja Biserko**, October 7th 2008, <http://www.novosti.rs/code/navigate.php?id=110#7980>; Politika, **Demand to the Interior Ministry and BIA to provide protection to Sonja Biserko**, October 7th, 2008, <http://www.politika.rs/vesti/najnovije-vesti/index.1.lt.htm>; Blic, **YUCOM seeks protection of Sonja Biserko**, October 7th, 2008, <http://www.blic.rs/drustvo.php?id=59965>.

⁷ Milorad Ulemek Legija, convicted for the murder of Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić and other political murders

to ensure protection from any kind of violence, threat of retaliation, de facto and de jure hostile discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary deed resulting from the legitimate use of one's rights guaranteed by the Declaration.

YUCOM addressed the Ministry of Culture and the Special Prosecutor for Organized Crime on October 6th 2008, seeking that they take appropriate measures regarding the publishing of a so-called feuilleton in the Kurir daily in the period between September 26th and October 6th, titled "How Đinđić was killed ", based on the recent publishing of an alleged book "Secret Transcripts" by an unknown author and the letters of Milorad Ulemek Legija, convicted for the murder of Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić and other political murders. The text brings a series of most vulgar and primitive attacks against Mrs. Sonja Biserko.

As in the previous case of addressing state organs, YUCOM published every step by means of a press release.⁸

The urgent actions were followed by an analysis of the attacks against Sonja Biserko and it was pointed out at the requests to the state as well as measures of protection, which were lacking. This analysis was the subject of the first issue of YUCOM's newsletter Hate Speech in Serbia: *Attacks against Sonja Biserko as a classic example of hate speech against female human rights defenders*⁹.

*"...YUCOM sent a written request to the Security and Information Agency (BIA – formerly: State Security Department) demanding that it – pursuant to its competences defined by law – make a security risks assessment for Ms. Biserko, with a view of taking necessary protection measures since Ms. Biserko has also been threatened physically. The Security and Information Agency **never replied** to this request – an eloquent indicator of state authorities' attitude to human security as a fundamental human right."*

The newsletter was forwarded to over one million addresses and published on the YUCOM website.

YUCOM will continue to call on state organs to implement provisions of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders in concrete cases of violations of defenders' rights, in order to ensure that the national strategy for improving the position of human rights defenders, as promised by the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, is going to be indeed implemented in practice.

⁸ <http://www.yucom.org.rs/rest.php?tip=vestgalerija&idSek=16&idSubSek=57&id=15&status=drugi>

⁹ http://www.yucom.org.rs/upload/vestgalerija_61_18/1227626201_GS_Hate_Speech-Newsletter-No-1-eng-Sonja_Biserko-24-11-08.pdf





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